

Recommendations of Transition Team Subcommittees

Finance, Budget, and Administration

Creating a 21st-century City Hall

Public Safety

Community Engagement and Empowerment

Neighborhood Development

Economic Development

Intergovernmental Cooperation

Presented to Mayor Kathy Sheehan

Albany, New York

January 14, 2014

Table of Contents

About this document	3
Introduction and Welcome	4
Transition Team Reports	
Finance, Budget, and Administration	5
Creating a 21st-century City Hall	9
Public Safety	16
Community Engagement and Empowerment	21
Neighborhood Development	25
Economic Development	37
Intergovernmental Cooperation	45

About this document

The topical sections of this report were compiled through the concerted efforts of seven subcommittees of City of Albany Mayor Kathy Sheehan's Transition Team. Given their charge by Mayor-elect Sheehan on November 26, 2013, the subcommittees completed their work in late December, and the report was compiled and edited in early January 2014. The Transition Team process was overseen by four lead chairs: Dr. Robert Jones, President of UAlbany; Hon. John J. McEneny, former New York State Assembly Member and a former city commissioner; Kevin O'Connor, former CEO of First Light Inc. and the Center for Economic Growth; and Hon. Nancy M. Burton, former City of Albany Comptroller and former member of the Common Council.

The teams were led by 22 co-chairs and consisted of nearly 100 local residents and stakeholders from across sectors and with different areas of interest and expertise. The names of the co-chairs and team members are listed at the beginning of each section.

Introduction and Welcome

We are proud to present this Transition Team Report to Mayor Kathy Sheehan and the Albany public. The reports of the seven sub-committees reflect the wealth of diversity that is the City of Albany today. Neighborhood representatives from all parts of the city, members of the business community, higher education professionals, those with special technical or subject matter expertise, current and former elected officials, and representatives of neighboring municipalities, the school district and other levels of government, all gathered in meeting rooms under very tight time constraints to produce their recommendations and strategies.

The committees were charged by the Mayor-Elect to develop specific strategies to: 1. engage and empower economically challenged neighborhoods; 2. address public safety concerns; 3. strengthen and rebuild Albany neighborhoods ; 4. stabilize Albany's fiscal condition; 5. Identify and prioritize technology investments; 6.improve linkages between economic development activities and employment of Albany residents; and 7. find ways that inter-municipal cooperation can produce savings to taxpayers throughout the county. Responding to these challenges, the committees accepted their serious and weighty responsibilities and produced goals and strategies to guide Albany's new mayor.

To a person, the co-chairs and members of the sub-committees felt honored and privileged to serve on the Transition Team to help provide a set of recommendations for the new administration. They reflect the expertise and passion of the participants to improve the livability and health of the city for current and future generations.

While suggestions in each of these areas are outlined throughout this report, there were several universal themes that were echoed in multiple groups:

- Albany must make a top-level ***commitment to linking Albany residents with jobs in the city, particularly those from underserved communities.***
- ***The city has all of the ingredients to make a livable and walkable city,*** but needs to focus on those things that attract Millennials and baby-boomers to urban living.
- The city should adopt a more ***customer-service-oriented*** approach in dealing with residents, business owners, and potential investors, including a ***"one-stop shop"*** approach to permitting.
- The city needs ***to encourage small business development and entrepreneurship***, including neighborhood services and retail.
- The rules of the city—be they traffic, zoning, special use permit, building code, or historic preservation – need to be made ***clear, and fairly, equitably, and predictably applied.***
- The city needs to take the lead in ***creating a new city-wide marketing campaign*** to tell the story of Albany.

Finance, Budget, and Administration

Co-chairs

Patrick Bulgaro

Hon. Shawn Morris

Transition Team Members

Matthew Bender IV

Nikki Brate

Hon. Frank Commisso Jr.

Hon. Richard Conti

Hon. Daniel Herring

Hon. Noelle Kinsch

Tom Mahar

Bob Powers

Chris Quirk

Introduction: Challenges and Assets

Like most cities in New York State, Albany faces many financial challenges: rising costs of employee benefits; stagnant state aid; high cost of fuel and utilities, to name a few. For Albany, these problems are compounded by the costs of serving as the state's capital, the county seat, and the region's largest city. The commercial property tax base is nearly 80 percent tax exempt, leaving Albany's homeowners and a handful of private sector businesses to shoulder the burden of providing services to both residents and the more than 70,000 commuters who enter the city each work day.

Paramount among Albany's most immediate challenges is a structural budget deficit estimated at between \$11 and \$18 million that has been plugged for years by spin-ups of 19A payments from the state, selling off space in the city's soon-to-close landfill, and spending down the city's fund balance—sources of revenue that are not sustainable and are quickly drying up.

Despite the challenges, the city can capitalize on some inherent assets and opportunities. Because of the size of the government, academic and health sectors, the Capital Region enjoys a relatively stable employment picture, and working to connect more Albany residents to living wages would encourage more investment in the city. The booming technology sector employs a demographic that seeks out city centers: planning for better residential communities could, again, attract investment into the urban core, and already completed plans for city neighborhoods can provide a road map to that end. Thriving medical and education communities, as well as NYS government, can provide insight and support for many of the efforts needed to put Albany back on solid financial footing.

The goal of this subcommittee has been to point out the broad areas for the new administration to mine for savings and revenue enhancement, while keeping in mind the Mayor's vision for Albany in the 21st century. There are no easy solutions to our city's fiscal problems, and this subcommittee did not spend time looking for a so-called "silver-bullet." **The city must develop a long-range plan for raising revenues and cutting expenses.**

Overview of Goals and Recommendations

Goal 1: Establish procedures and management tools to create a more transparent and well managed city budget.

Goal 2: Review all properties within the city not presently paying property taxes to ensure that homeowners and businesses are not bearing an unfair tax burden.

Goal 3: Determine whether Albany's status as the capital city creates a disproportionate burden on city taxpayers.

Goal 4: Realign and establish administrative functions in order to improve government efficiency and customer service and facilitate investment.

Goals and Strategies

Goal 1: Establish procedures and management tools to create a more transparent and well managed city budget.

Strategies to meet Goal 1:

- a. **Establish an Office of Management and Budget.** A more robust Office of Management and Budget, with a budget director and fiscal analyst staff, would enable the city to better plan, monitor, and manage the city budget. Administrative resources, including fiscal staff that currently operates in some of the major departments, could be realigned to give the Office of Management and Budget the resources to better monitor departmental compliance with approved budgets. In addition, purchasing could be centralized in the Office of Management and Budget, which would provide efficiencies and greater oversight of expenditures.
- b. **Employ technology and industry standards to improve the quality of the information used to support and maintain the budget.** Fiscal staff should work with department heads on an ongoing basis to monitor, compile, and project budget data, providing for budgets that rely on solid historical trends and projections, unit costs and/or performance data. Without such information, it is difficult to measure the effectiveness of a department or program. Mid-year adjustments should also be considered.
- c. **Develop budget transfer and management process that phases out the Board of Estimate and Apportionment ("E&A").** After-the-fact budget transfers that occur in a non-transparent manner undermine the public's trust in government and the ability of the administration to control spending. Albany is one of only two cities in the state that have retained this budget management mechanism.
- d. **Determine the threshold at which the budget office can initiate both intra- and inter-departmental transfers,** and when transfers must be approved by Common Council.
- e. **Determine whether the current E&A process for budget transfers is still effective.** More timely cost/financial information would also allow the City to manage its budget more effectively and facilitate a timelier annual close-out process.

- f. **Develop a multi-year financial plan.** A written, multi-year financial plan that projects revenues and expenses would serve as a useful planning tool for City departments. It would help provide better transparency around the City's financial position to both officials and residents.

Goal 2: Review all properties within the city not presently paying property taxes and all programs conferring tax exemptions to assure that homeowners and businesses are not bearing an unfair or disproportionate tax burden because of inappropriate tax relief.

Strategies to meet Goal 2:

- a. **Request the IDA to conduct a retrospective 5-year study** to determine whether projects produced the economic benefits anticipated that justified tax abatement.
- b. **Request the IDA to conduct a retrospective 5-year study** particularly those that house "for-profit" entities, to determine whether they have improperly reduced City tax revenues and warrant a broad-based recertification of eligibility for tax exemptions.
- c. **Determine whether non-profit agencies consume a disproportionate share of city services** in such areas as public safety or fire protection, and if so, determine whether a system of chargebacks for excessive use is warranted.
- d. **Explore whether large non-profit agencies, such as hospitals, colleges, and other facilities, would consider Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILOTS) or Services in Lieu of Taxes (SILOTS).** Such SILOTS might include providing services to the city, such as fleet management, human resources, or purchasing.
- e. **Determine whether novel developments among non-profit agencies that produce direct for-profit activity or collaboration with taxable commercial businesses are consistent with current City taxation policy.**

Goal 3: Document whether Albany's status as New York's capital city creates a disproportionate burden on city taxpayers or whether state aid fairly compensates the city for its services.¹

Strategies to meet Goal 3:

- a. **Determine whether state facilities constitute a higher percentage of city property than similar upstate cities.**
- b. **Calculate the degree to which, if appropriate, city services such as fire and police, and infrastructure, including road and street use, are impacted by a daily influx of state workers and related businesses that represent more than a 50 percent increase in Albany's diurnal population.**
- c. **Determine whether state aid fairly reflects the basic cost of City services as well as inflationary increases.**

¹ The issue of Albany's status as both state capital and the home of many not for profit institutions has been broached in recent papers: one from PFM Strategic Consulting, entitled "Capital Punishment; another from the Albany Commission on Public-Private Budgetary Cooperation.

- d. **Identify the amount of overtime incurred by APD and AFD caused by support provided to the state** in managing demonstrations, protests, and other public advocacy events.

Goal 4: Realign and establish certain administrative functions in order to improve government efficiency and customer service, and facilitate commercial and residential investment.

Strategies to meet Goal 4:

- a. **Consolidate code enforcement functions into single unit.** Currently shared by Buildings and Regulatory Compliance and the Department of General Services, code enforcement plays a critical role in ensuring safe, livable, and attractive buildings and streets. The current configuration is inefficient in enforcing the ordinances and confusing for city residents trying solve problems and build communities. Consolidation would provide for better enforcement at every level: from issuing summonses, working on solutions, and providing for court appearances.
- b. **Group similar departmental functions together to reduce redundancies and improve services while containing costs.** For instance, some functions that are separate obviously belong together (DGS should perform parks and recreation building maintenance, for example), while other configurations put offices together that don't seem to fit (Special Events is a programmatic division, and likely should be aligned with Recreation rather than DGS.) Similarly, Youth and Workforce Services is grant-based job training and could be better suited to Community Development.
- c. **Establish a small-business office or liaison.** Small businesses are key to revitalizing walkable neighborhoods and to creating vibrant office and commercial districts. Yet, startups frequently encounter obstacles navigating the City's archaic maze of permitting, zoning, and building requirements. Creating an office that streamlines this process will encourage more entrepreneurs and professionals to locate in city communities.
- d. **Establish a neighborhood-centric mechanism to facilitate the growth of and investment in Albany's residential neighborhoods.** Many of Albany's historic neighborhoods are in dire need of the kind of investment that residential homeownership brings. But potential investors frequently encounter the same kind of obstacles as small-business owners. Even long-term residents are frequently frustrated by city policies that are contradictory and services that are difficult to access. Consolidating access to many community services and information into single office will improve the city's ability to attract and retain residential homeowners and long-term tenants and investors.
- e. **Develop a city-wide marketing function.** Special events, homeownership grants, development opportunities—Albany's ability to "sell" itself as a welcoming and vibrant place to live, work, and play—are hampered by the lack of a centralized marketing function that combines all these elements and creates an Albany "brand." Individual departments take on their own information dissemination, likely resulting in increased publicity costs and poorly managed efforts.

Creating a 21st-century City Hall

Co-chairs

Akosua Garcia Yeboah

Mark Dorry

Transition Team Members

Anthony Capece

Frank Coons

Sandra Fox

Antoine Harrison

Linda Jackson-Chalmers

Hopeton Smalling

Nala Woodard

Introduction: Challenges and Assets

The City of Albany has not kept pace with changes in technology, nor has it provided its employees with the tools and training they need to do their jobs effectively and efficiently in the 21st century. As a result of the advocacy of then-Treasurer Sheehan, the city hired a Chief Information Technology Officer in 2013 and recently announced the purchase of new Building and Codes software, which is scheduled to be implemented in the first quarter of 2014. Still, the city is far behind in the adoption of technology that will allow it to make better decisions about how taxpayer dollars are spent.

This plan represents our sense of extreme urgency about the need to catch up, keep up, and provide all City employees with the technological tools and support services they need to succeed in their positions and help the city function and thrive. The strategies, initiatives, and actions presented in this report are just a beginning point, providing a roadmap for the coming years.

Overview of Goals and Recommendations

Goal 1: Develop a Strategic Technology Plan

Goal 2: Create a city-wide IT governance structure

Goal 3: Fund information technology strategically

Goal 4: Develop IT security policies and a business-continuity plan

Goal 5: Conduct organizational structure review

Goal 6: Establish regional partnerships

Goal 7: Review information technology infrastructure

Goal 8: Train City employees and IT staff

Goal 9: Adopt open or community-sourced software solutions

Goal 10: Adopt process-management best practices

Goal 11: Replace obsolete mission-critical technology and systems

Goal 12: Implement an Open Government Strategy

Goals and Strategies

Goal 1: Develop a Strategic Technology Plan

Resources required for information technology are scarce and must be carefully allocated. A Strategic Technology Plan will ensure that information technology resources are implemented with adequate funding for hardware, software, training, and support to meet specific functionality and reliability targets. Such a plan will foster a focused allocation of funds capable of providing measurable results and thus a more substantial and robust return on investment (ROI). Certain analytics and efficiency measures must be established to create the desired ROI with the clear identification of specific long-range and short-term impacts.

Strategies to meet Goal 1:

- a. The plan should project the City's goals for a 3-to-5-year timeframe and provide specific direction for each current information system as well as any new system.
- b. Create a comprehensive and prioritized list of business functions supported by information systems.
- c. Determine specific operational goals for each business function with target dates for meeting those goals.
- d. Determine new system implementation costs for each year of the plan, including future costs for maintenance, support, upgrades, and replacement.
- e. Schedule annual reviews of the plan and modify and update it to reflect changing priorities and technologies.
- f. Ensure that City's leadership fully understands and supports the plan.

Goal 2: Create a city-wide IT governance structure.

Information technology is essential to supporting the business objectives and efficient day-to-day management of the city. Technology initiatives should have a city-wide focus when being considered, looking for shared applications that reduce redundancy and eliminate inefficient use of resources.

Strategies to meet Goal 2:

- a. Create a broad-based IT governance structure that incorporates and takes into account all City departments. Department heads must be engaged in charting IT directions and not simply expect the Information Technology department to perform in an isolated manner.
- b. The Chief Information Technology Officer should work with other municipalities and institutions in the community, incorporating examples of successful IT governance structures.
- c. The IT department, in collaboration with the staff from all City departments, should review the current standards where they exist and identify appropriate architectures and tools so that departmentally based systems may integrate or scale up securely and successfully with the broader enterprise system environment.
- d. Evaluate technology initiatives for their full requirements, costs, and ROI, covering the full life cycle of the initiative, before a solution is developed or acquired and implemented.

Goal 3: Strategically fund Information Technology.

The City should adopt a view that IT resources are strategic assets to the city. As such, IT funding models should be developed to encourage effective and abundant deployment of Information Technology and efficient investment in IT holistically across all City departments.

Strategies to meet Goal 3:

- a. Create a funding pool for key elements within the IT department by reallocating funds within its existing budget and with additional support from the City.
- b. Execute a thorough cost and investment analysis when new systems or technology services are deployed to ensure that adequate funding is allocated to not only provide for initial implementation but also to ensure that ongoing annual costs are addressed and accounted for.
- c. Support the appropriate centralization of services and infrastructure for the overall betterment of agility, delivery, and efficiency for providing IT services across all City departments.

Goal 4: Develop IT security policies and a Business Continuity Plan.

Information technology is a strategic and critical asset of the City, and loss, in part or total, of the IT environment, services, and data can cripple the institution. The City should develop and deploy appropriate policies and effective enforcement means to secure the integrity of IT resources, safeguard institutional information, protect the privacy of information, and ensure the continuity of the City's IT resources and information repositories in the face of possible disaster scenarios.

Strategies to meet Goal 4:

- a. The IT department must lead the way to define standards for device and information security and to communicate best practices and policies for all City departments and users.
- b. Develop and enforce security policies in cooperation with the various departments.
- c. Review the current structure regarding data stewardship and determine whether that structure is appropriate to properly define and administer access to City data and to ensure that policies for such access are adequate and enforced.
- d. Review and update the IT Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity Plan (DR/BCP) with input from department staff and support from senior-level leadership. Funding for disaster recovery should be prudent, but in line with both the extent of risk and the level of expectations of City administration.

Goal 5: Conduct organizational structure review.

At present, the responsibility for managing technology is divided between a centralized IT organization responsible for most City departments, with the exception of the Police Department, which has its own IT staff. This arrangement has led to a high degree of duplication and divergence in the services delivered throughout the city. Several departments also used independent consultants to provide specific IT services.

Strategies to meet Goal 5:

- a. Explore standardizing, consolidating, and aligning IT resources and services to significantly maximize consistency, reduce costs, and markedly improve service delivery. Certain other functions not currently handled by the IT organization should also be considered for consolidation.
- b. Coordinate planning, implementation, and support for computer, phone and cellular communication systems. The convergence of the computer and communications fields in the marketplace will have a direct impact on how technology is used to satisfy various requirements. (Most notably, this can be seen in the overlap in the way commercial providers are now offering telephone, Internet access, and video services; the growing practice of using Voice over the Internet Protocol (VoIP) technology to deliver myriad services across the same communications infrastructure will continue this trend.)
- c. Consolidate support for printers, copiers, FAX machines, scanners, and audio-video technology to take advantage of multi-function devices that connect directly to a computer network.

Goal 6: Establish regional partnerships.

More and more in the municipal space, cities and counties are teaming up to share computing infrastructure. The City will identify potential partners for this endeavor, should it decide this strategy is a feasible one.

Strategies to meet Goal 6:

- a. Investigate the feasibility of using shared data centers managed by an independent service provider. This approach has helped municipalities reduce operating costs and administrative overhead associated with running a full-fledged IT Department, along with hardware such as servers and networking components. Planned appropriately, a shared computing infrastructure can help provide network resiliency, improved backhaul performance, and disaster-recovery capabilities.
- b. Adopt a model of public partnership with academia partners to pursue new ways of applying technologies to solve problems of information management and service delivery. Collaborations with the University at Albany's Office for Information Technology, the Center for Technology in Government and the Center for Human Services Research should be explored.

Goal 7: Review Information Technology infrastructure.

The City should have a sound, advanced, secure, and productive physical IT infrastructure (including but not limited to facilities, hardware, networks, and software) capable of supporting broad and effective use by all departments and staff throughout the City, including remote offices. For IT operations, cloud computing can provide an opportunity to strategically evaluate outsourcing functions that have traditionally been maintained and operated internally, to achieve cost savings and better utilize existing resources.

Strategies to meet Goal 7:

- a. Immediately review and address the need for data center/cyber infrastructure facilities that are appropriately sized, powered (including backup power), and cooled to meet the needs of city-wide demands for such resources.
- b. Develop a strategy and approach to the deployment and support of cloud-based computing, including infrastructure and hosted third-party application solutions.
- c. Evaluate the hybridization of public/private cloud offerings across the spectrum of IT infrastructure and services and determine appropriate paths toward use of such offerings. Cloud technologies are transforming the way computing power is bought, sold, and delivered. Rather than purchasing licenses or hardware, users may now obtain computing power as a service, buying only as much as they need, and only when they need it. This new business model can bring meaningful efficiency and cost savings to the City.

Goal 8: Train City employees and IT staff

IT innovation cannot be achieved with technology adoption alone. Effective and constantly updated training and knowledge resources are integral to technology adoption.

Human capital development and management is the lifeblood of any high-performing organization. High-performing IT organization cannot be achieved without having the right people doing the right things in the right way. The City must develop strategies for retaining and training those already on board and also attracting and recruiting new staff as needed. While we believe opportunities for quick gains in efficiency and effectiveness exist, long-term success ultimately is based on a commitment to shared values, principles, and objectives that consider business needs and supporting technology in a holistic manner. The possession of appropriate knowledge and skills by IT staff is a critical element.

Strategies to meet Goal 8:

- a. The Chief Information Technology Officer should work with City leadership and HR staff to identify the appropriate job descriptions, qualifications, and salaries needed to support current and future IT investments and positions.
- b. Determine appropriate and effective means of training for every new technology adopted. Options could include in-house training through a train-the-trainer model, ad-hoc training opportunities (e.g., contractor, online, or hybrid), and others.
- c. Continuously enhance and develop training and education programs so they are delivered in the most cost-effective ways.
- d. Planning for every technology implementation must include integrated training time, budget, and methodology. Those who use IT and those who support its use must be adequately trained so as to minimize their demand for broader support and maximize the effectiveness of their use of IT.

Goal 9: Adopt open or community-sourced software solutions.

The IT department should champion the pursuit of open or community-sources software solutions for enterprise-level use and only pursue more expensive commercial offerings when there is sufficient value

or functional advantage in doing so.

Strategy to meet Goal 9:

- a. Apply for Code for America's fellowship program. This program recruits talented, technical people into a year of public service with local governments to show what's possible.

Goal 10: Adopt process-management best practices.

Process is a critical part of effective IT systems management. With respect to IT, process management refers to the business functions that govern and control the management of incidents/problems, changes, assets, etc. It is important to understand that in order to be effective, these processes do not function independently nor do they exist in a vacuum. They relate closely to each other vis-a-vis inputs, functional dependencies, and outputs.

Strategies to meet Goal 10:

- a. Before, during, and after implementation of technology initiatives the city staff (IT and Business Units) should consider incorporating process management best practices including:
 - **Incident/Problem Management** governs the organizational process that governs how unexpected deviations from a service or function are handled from the moment they are detected to final resolution.
 - **Change Management** governs how organizations work through the ongoing process of implementing changes into the environment without interrupting the function of the organization.
 - **Asset Management** is the organizational process that governs the tracking of the full life cycle of IT or non-IT assets from the time of capital planning to procurement until disposition of that asset. The process is primarily focused on the day-to-day activities of identification and maintenance of the asset data model, and the maintenance of asset data.

Goal 11: Replace obsolete mission-critical technology and systems.

The City's current mission-critical financial software, which includes payroll and property tax billing and collection, are over 15 years old and are woefully obsolete. The city recently issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) for an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software suite. An ERP solution should improve the automation and support of a range of administrative and management applications, including Human Resources, Payroll, General Ledger, Purchasing, Budgeting, Accounts Payable, and Time and Attendance. A crucial goal of the ERP project should be to provide business process improvement and re-engineering opportunities to achieve more effective and efficient business processes throughout the City. The following lists some of the major objectives that the City is looking for in an integrated ERP system.

Strategies to meet Goal 11:

- a. Replace or upgrade current obsolete New World AS/400 Financial System.

- b. Provide complete integration between Time & Attendance/Personnel/Payroll and financial systems and processes.
- c. Eliminate standalone business processing systems, independent tracking mechanisms, and paper-intensive manual processes.
- d. Provide a centralized approach to business processing.
- e. Implement a flexible system that can respond to changing business needs.
- f. Increase information analysis capabilities that support enhanced decision making capabilities.
- g. Increase public access to organization information and citizen interaction with City services, including an online payment interface and potential self-service kiosk stations throughout the city.

Goal 12: Implement an Open Government Strategy

The Division of IT should champion the pursuit of open government technology solutions that take openness, accountability and accessibility to another level. To make city government more accountable and responsive to the residents of Albany, the city should make agency performance data available to the public. These metrics will serve as a public report card to ensure all city employees are held to a high standard. In addition, they will provide information about service delivery, administrative efficiency, and ethical standards.

Strategies to meet Goal 12:

- a. The city should consider opening itself up to the public with a Citizens Dashboard. The Citizens Dashboard should present a compilation of indicators that reveal a lot of information at a glance to the citizens of Albany. The Dashboard is one way for the city to communicate to citizens what it is doing in an open, transparent, informative, interactive way. The Dashboard would include performance metrics on public safety (i.e. neighborhood crime stats), code enforcement, citizen complaints and other real-time data about services that matter most to the citizens of Albany.
- b. To improve performance of citizen services, the city should publish all service performance metrics and related data online, grouped by category and updated at least monthly.
- c. Make all financial data, like budgets, taxes, and expenditures, available online in a usable way (not static reports).
- d. Create a converged data site with neighboring cities, counties and states. Federate city data to the national catalog, data.gov.

Public Safety

Co-chairs

Dr. Alice Green

Chief Steven Krokoff

Hon. Larry Rosen

Rev. Dr. Edward B. Smart

Transition Team Members

Sheriff Craig Apple

Sam Fresina

Lisa Good

Hon. Kelly Kimbrough

Tandra LaGrone

Vera “Mike” Michaelson

Jacqui Williams

Introduction

The Public Safety Transition Team respectfully submits these recommendations in the specified format: challenges, assets, goals, and strategies. In making these recommendations, the Team acknowledges three circumstances that affect the achievement of the goals specified in this document. First, the Team fully realizes that the promotion of public safety in Albany is not a responsibility solely of the Albany Police Department, but is also dependent upon the community’s collaboration with the department. Second, the policies and practices of other agencies at the city, county, state, and federal levels affect public safety in Albany. Third, the Team recognizes that since crime is largely a function of societal conditions such as poverty and inadequate educational services so, too, is public safety.

In light of these three circumstances, efforts to achieve the four public safety goals presented in this document should be coordinated with recommendations from the transition teams addressing community engagement and empowerment; intergovernmental cooperation; neighborhood development; and economic development and job creation. Additionally, though this document discusses adopting a public health and safety approach to drug policy, the Team also recommends that gun violence in Albany be addressed as a health and public safety issue.

Challenges

Albany’s residents are concerned about violence, property crimes, traffic safety, and other public safety issues. Additionally, families, neighborhoods, and communities are traumatized when an act of violence occurs, and when the needs of individuals with mental health issues who become involved with law enforcement are not addressed. There is insufficient access to mental health, substance abuse, PTSD, and other treatment services in many Albany neighborhoods affected by crime. Unfortunately, very little (if any) new City funding will be available for new programming.

As indicated by the Mayor, the proposed 2014 budget includes a structural deficit estimated between \$11 and \$18 million. Addressing public safety challenges will require effectively engaging the community in collaborating with law-enforcement officials and other agencies to produce effective results. Such engagement may be challenging, given racial tensions that have existed between the police department and the community under prior police administrations.

Assets

There are several indications that progress is being made in engaging the community in public safety issues. Over the past four years, the police department committed to true **community policing**. The Chief and his staff have made considerable efforts to educate the community, including the minority community, about community policing. The meeting of the Albany Community Policing Advisory Committee (ACPAC) is held monthly in different neighborhoods of the city. ACPAC, with community representatives from all 15 of Albany's wards, provides a forum for discussion of community healing and community building, and strives to promote partnerships between community organizations, businesses, and the APD.

Another example, "**Operation Safe Corridor**" in the Lark Street and Central Avenue districts, was developed through a collaboration among In Our Own Voices, the Pride Center of the Capital Region, the Albany Police Department, the Central Avenue BID, and the Lark Street BID in an effort to increase awareness and understanding of crime prevention and safety for everyone who visits these neighborhoods. Additionally, community programs such as SNUG, a program to reduce gun violence in the City of Albany, have engaged the community in anti-violence activities.

Furthermore, the Police Department has launched **recruitment efforts to increase the number of minorities on the police force**. The chief's commitment to serving all residents of the city was most recently evidenced by his participation in a November 6, 2013, meeting in New York City to discuss the possibility of instituting a LEAD-like program in Albany. Currently successfully operating in Seattle, Washington, the LEAD (Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion) program is a collaboration between law enforcement, prosecutors, business associations, defense groups, and social service agencies that diverts low-level drug dealers and users out of the criminal justice system and into health and social services. Most promisingly, it is highly likely that private foundation funding could support a LEAD-like approach in Albany. Additionally, under the newly implemented federal Affordable Care Act, individual health insurance programs cover many of the services needed by those afflicted with substance abuse and/or mental health problems.

The **Albany Police Department's vision statement** is as follows:

The Albany Police Department will strive to eliminate crime and the fear of crime by inspiring and empowering our community to work together to improve our quality of life and make Albany the safest community in America.

To effectively realize this vision, the city must acknowledge that to "make Albany the safest community in America" requires "healing wounded communities," one of the goals articulated in the Albany Police Department's strategic plan. As described in "Pathway to Change":

According to the plan, "wounded" communities are caused in part by police actions in that community, but poverty is the primary cause of wounded communities. The causes of poverty are such things as lack of education, inability to access services, and a lack of

physical and mental health services. To heal wounded communities, the root causes of poverty need to be attacked. The police can help accomplish this by, for example, calling in experts in mental health, substance abuse services, PTSD treatment or other treatment services that seem appropriate on a domestic violence call.

The community, itself, must also own responsibility for contributing to an effective public safety vision in Albany. Everyone must be persuaded to be a part of the solution. Stakeholders (property and business owners, elders, faith leaders, young people, etc.) will be essential in modeling and promoting safe practices and cultural values among their peers. Community members should be encouraged to support public safety-promoting conditions, such as: visible neighborhood community centers; the availability of affordable housing; enforcement of the provisions of the Fair Housing Law; implementation of community policing; restorative justice practices; and reentry programs for those returning to the community from a period of incarceration.

Overview of Goals and Recommendations

Goal 1: Adopt a city-wide public health and safety approach to drug policy.

Goal 2: Make city law-enforcement policies transparent to the community in order to empower neighborhoods to participate in the creation of public-safety policies.

Goal 3: All young people in Albany will view law enforcement with less fear and more respect, and as partners in the realization of their own aspirations.

Goal 4: The streets of Albany will be safe for vehicles, bicyclists, pedestrians, and, especially, children.

Goals and Strategies

Goal 1: Adopt a city-wide public health and safety approach to drug policy

A potential way to help heal wounded communities in Albany is to adopt a public health and safety approach to drug policy, as recommended by the New York Academy of Medicine and the Drug Policy Alliance. According to these entities, under current law-enforcement based drug policies, “Drug use and its associated harms continue, and our policy responses have resulted in the mass incarceration of New Yorkers, increased racial disparities, stigmatization of individuals and whole subpopulations, fragmented families, deep distrust between police and the communities they serve, and millions of dollars in costs during times of both economic prosperity and, more recently, fiscal crisis.”² Albany should work to promote public safety and health; address drug addiction as a health issue; and reduce unwarranted racial disparities in drug law enforcement. In accordance with these recommendations and the Department’s recognition of the need to “heal wounded communities,” the city of Albany should develop and promulgate drug policies that transcend the criminal justice system.

² The Drug Policy Alliance, “Blueprint for a Public Health and Safety Approach to Drug Policy – Executive Summary,” March 2013, p. 1, http://www.drugpolicy.org/sites/default/files/DPA_NYAM_Executive%20Summary_v3_0.pdf

Strategies to meet Goal 1:

- a. City government leaders should declare that in Albany the proliferation of drugs is to be treated as a *health* issue, rather than a criminal justice issue, and the trauma on families and neighborhoods resulting from drug use and violence (shootings and stabbings) must be addressed in the efforts to make Albany the safest city in America.
- b. *Pre-arrest diversion* should be considered during initial police encounters. Participation in the LEAD (Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion)-like program currently being established in selected cities in New York State can divert low level offenders into community programs, rather than courts. Funding from such organizations as the Open Society Institute may be available to support this initiative.³
- c. Develop methods for assessing mental health issues of individuals interacting with law enforcement, at the earliest stage possible, before arrest if appropriate.
- d. Develop city policies in employment and services that contribute to the successful reentry of people returning to the community from a period of incarceration. Policies should include all city departments.

Goal 2: Make city law-enforcement policies transparent to the community in order to empower neighborhoods to actively participate in the creation of public-safety policies.**Strategies to meet Goal 2:**

- a. Proposed changes to policing practice at the city level should be accompanied by a racial and ethnic impact statement.
- b. The Albany Police Department Chief should provide an annual “State of the Albany Police Department” report to the Albany Common Council. This report should include a description of each police department policy, program, and practice implemented during the year, including the racial and ethnic impact analysis of each new policy, program, and practice.
- c. City government should work with the county and state governments to implement racial and ethnic impact statements for all prosecutorial, public defense, and sentencing statutes and policies.

Goal 3: All young people in Albany will view law enforcement with less fear and more respect, and as partners in the realization of their own aspirations.

Many young people in Albany believe that the police do not understand cultural differences, and thoughtful, concentrated work needs to be done to mend this rift.

Strategies to meet Goal 3:

- a. The police department, district attorney’s office, Sheriff’s department, public defenders and the judiciary must be trained to work with people from all cultural identities and gender

³ As a result of federal and state drug sweeps conducted in the city in the past few years, 50 of Albany’s minority males have been sentenced to more than 600 years in prison for non-violent offenses.

orientations in a way that promotes respect and dignity, including the examination of personal biases.

- b. Integrate police outreach efforts into programs that serve or interact with young people.
- c. Devise ways for all City departments to engage in programs that serve and interact with young people, contributing to the Albany Police Department's plan for "winning over a generation."

Goal 4: The streets of Albany will be safe for vehicles, bicyclists, pedestrians and, especially, children.

Historically, enforcement of basic traffic laws in Albany has been lax, resulting in dangerous situations for pedestrians, cyclists and drivers alike. The police department has already made "taking back our streets" part of their strategic plan. The City should implement the mechanisms necessary to realize that goal. As part of its strategic plan, the department intends to bring traffic decorum (e.g., both motorists and pedestrians obeying traffic statutes) back to the city in an attempt to "re-evaluate our shared spaces."

Strategies to meet Goal 4:

- a. Establish citywide implementation of traffic law enforcement.
- b. Include a strong information and educational component for drivers, cyclists and pedestrians regarding new enforcement policies.
- c. Engage the community in discussion of problem traffic areas, including dangerous intersections, chronic "speedways," and illegal parking.
- d. Maintain mapping of traffic accidents and citations in order to better evaluate traffic safety needs.
- e. Evaluate high pedestrian traffic areas, particularly around schools and employment centers to determine better crosswalk designations.

Community Engagement and Empowerment

Co-chairs

Hon. Barbara Smith

Monique Wahba

Pedro Perez

Transition Team Members

Ivette Alfonso

Ladan Alomar

Dean Katharine Briar-Lawson

Sean Brown

Brother Yusuf Burgess

Rabbi Donald P. Cashman

Rev. Victor E. Covington

Fr. Chris DeGiovine

Hon. Catherine M. Fahey

Hon. Leah Golby

Dahlia Herring

Jonathan Jones

Jeff Mirel

Harris Oberlander

Bill Ritchie

Arlene Way

Peter Wohl

Introduction: Challenges and Assets

Many residents of Albany's most economically challenged neighborhoods feel disengaged and ignored by city government. Decades of disenfranchisement have resulted in an unequal distribution of resources and, more significantly, unequal access to power and decision making. While many U.S. cities and government agencies are actively working to resolve similar issues, Albany has not developed such an agenda or policies to address Albany's high poverty rate (25%), growing number of immigrants (particularly refugees), and increased diversity (30.8% African American, 8.6% Hispanic or Latino, 5% Asian, 3.7% two or more races). Social, economic, and health disparities threaten the well-being not only of communities of color, but the city as a whole and the Capital Region. Indeed, the lack of diversity in the city's workforce, particularly in decision making roles, is indicative of Albany's particular situation.

Albany's great diversity is a major asset that demands the implementation of a vital Equity Agenda. People's myriad experiences shaped by race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, class, sexuality, religion, disability/ability, and age are a rich resource for developing an inclusive civic culture. Up until now this resource has been largely untapped. Another asset that has emerged in recent years is dynamic new leadership within city government and in key educational institutions that embodies significant diversity, creating new energy and ideas for bringing about positive changes. The city's extensive network of social service agencies, not-for-profits, and religious communities provides essential resources for Albany's most challenged residents. This social safety net will be strengthened and become more effective by adopting and adhering to an Equity Agenda.

This committee's objective is for Albany to become a place where all people have access to economic opportunity; where diversity and inclusion are valued and understood to be a precious asset; where all voices have multiple opportunities to be heard; where eradicating vast inequality is the highest priority; where power and decision making are shared; and where equity is understood to be the bedrock of the city's success. Our overarching recommendation is to establish a culture of equity that effectively addresses racial, gender, economic, social, political, and health disparities.

Overview of Goals and Recommendations

Goal 1: Create an Equity Agenda that ensures city policies and resources lead to inclusion.

Goal 2: Develop and support neighborhood governance mechanisms to enable involvement of residents who traditionally have been excluded from participation.

Goal 3: Prioritize initiatives that address poverty.

Goals and Strategies

Goal 1: Create an Equity Agenda that ensures city policies and resources lead to inclusion

Equity is grounded in economic and social justice. It is achieved when everyone has access to the opportunities necessary to satisfy their essential needs, advance their well-being, and achieve their full potential. Inherent in the concept of equity are the values of fairness, inclusiveness, democracy, and equal access to power and decision-making. A city-driven Equity Agenda will encourage investments in areas like education, job training, and infrastructure, and express the city's commitment to collective action to address equity issues. Other cities (e.g., Portland, Oregon) and national experts (e.g., the National League of Cities and PolicyLink) have already implemented such an agenda, and can serve as a resource.

Strategies to meet Goal 1:

- a. Adopt equity as part of the city's overall mission, expressing that the City of Albany sees equity as fundamental to our collective health, vitality, and success.
- b. Adopt equity as part of a vision of economic success for all citizens, an appreciation that the City of Albany cannot have a strong vibrant economy without strong and vibrant neighborhoods everywhere.
- c. Develop an Equity Screen to assess all city operations, initiatives, programs and actions. The use of the screen would require an evaluation of city projects and activities using key questions, such as:
 1. How will we ensure equity when we engage community stakeholders?
 2. How does this address unique community needs?
 3. How will this increase the city's ability to be accessible and inclusive?
 4. Will this project/policy/action enhance or hinder a movement toward economic justice in the city.
 5. In terms of equity, what might be the unintended consequences/risks of doing or not doing the proposed action?

- d. For the city government to lead by example, restructure city departments and offices to address equity consistently.
- e. Assign staff responsibilities for assessing coordinating and implementing the equity agenda. Where possible, staff should have experience in assessing and implementing such an initiative; in the absence of such experience the city should look outside for training or consultation.
- f. Assess language access to city services, policies and programs and develop and implement policies to establish equitable language access to all city offices and services, including accessibility for persons who are deaf. Create access to online, over the phone and in person translation and interpretation services for city departments and offices.
- g. Demonstrate the city's commitment to equity by increasing opportunities for education about and celebration of the city's diverse cultures and communities.
- h. Evaluate available educational and enrichment programs for efficacy, innovation, and sustainability in supporting the City's Equity Agenda. Facilitate collaborations among these providers to best utilize their core competencies and to realize more efficient use of funding.
- i. Establish a community-based advisory group to support the implementation of the Equity Agenda.

Goal 2: Develop neighborhood governance mechanisms to enable involvement of residents traditionally excluded from participation.

People of color, young people, those who are economically challenged, and immigrants and refugees commonly have less access to decision-making opportunities about their neighborhoods and communities. The city must develop mechanisms to include and empower traditionally disenfranchised people with the objective of building residents' capacity to address problems and develop a positive relationship with city government.

Strategies to meet Goal 2:

- a. Establish **Neighborhood Assemblies** that enable residents to participate in decision making for their community. The assemblies are not only neighborhood meetings, but regularly occurring, structured mechanisms for residents to make important decisions about city governance, especially in regard to funding. Neighborhood Assemblies can be the platform for carrying out **Participatory Budgeting** and other decision making that can lead to more equitable resource distribution. Successful Neighborhood Assemblies should engage both those who generally participate in civic and community events and those who do not, and give elected officials enhanced opportunities to listen to the priorities of their constituents.
- b. Cooperate with **Community Benefit Agreements**, which give residents the opportunity to negotiate with developers concerning the impact of major projects upon their neighborhoods.
- c. Support a **Community Leadership Academy** where residents can access training in various civic engagement, community involvement and parent engagement methods that will make them more effective advocates.

- d. Implement **Participatory Budgeting** which can “lead to more equitable resource distribution and more innovative and responsive projects.”⁴

Goal 3: Prioritize initiatives that address poverty.

Strategies to meet Goal 3:

- a. Provide education about and publicize use of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), as well as publicizing the locations of VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) sites, such as Albany Public Libraries, which do free tax preparation. Develop partnerships with local institutions to encourage more residents to take advantage of tax credits and filing help.
- b. Build on income tax initiatives to providing access to financial literacy information and support for establishing a personal bank account for those who may not have one.
- c. Be proactive in increasing the percentage of City residents who are hired to work on major construction projects in the City.
- d. Develop new methods to publicize the availability of city job openings or testing opportunities in communities with high unemployment.
- e. Create apprenticeship programs with trade unions for residents seeking occupational ladders out of poverty, including those working to reintegrate into the community after a term of incarceration.
- f. Encourage the corporate sector to participate in the City’s Equity Agenda and to champion economic development, job creation, and employment that provides occupational ladders for Albany’s economically challenged neighborhoods and residents.

⁴ Holly Russon Gilman, “New York’s Big Participatory Budgeting Moment,” GovLabBlog, the Governance Lab at NYU, posted by Stefaan Verhulst, November 6, 2013.

Neighborhood Development

Co-Chairs

Judd Feinman

Hon. Carolyn McLaughlin

Colleen M. Ryan

Transition Team Members

Hon. Dorcey Applyrs

Phoebe Bender

Bill Brandow

Greg Corso

Hon. Judy Doesschate

Brad Glass

Michael Guidice

Christopher Hawver

David Hogenkamp

Bill Kelly

Bill McLaughlin

Louise McNeilly

Doug Melnick

Anton Pasquill

Willie White

Deborah Zamer

Introduction

Albany is a city of neighborhoods. And whether those neighborhoods are made up of well-kept, tree-lined streets or blocks where some buildings are dilapidated or vacant, the key to strong neighborhoods is the people who live in them.

Fortunately for all of us, the ties that bind are still strong in Albany's neighborhoods, from Arbor Hill to Eagle Hill, from Pine Hills to West Hill, and many in between. Community connections—sometimes referred to as “social capital”—add value to all of our lives.

The Neighborhood Development Transition Subcommittee is honored to present our findings and recommendations to Mayor Kathy Sheehan. We look forward to continuing to work with her and the administration to help Albany rise to its full potential.

Challenges

Albany has plenty of plans. During its August 2007 visit to Albany, the Sustainable Design Assessment Team (SDAT), a program of the American Institute of Architects, referred to at least 11. Most of these plans are presented with great fanfare and then shelved. Fortunately, many people are still willing to participate in the brainstorming sessions—like these Transition Committees—which ultimately shape the future of our city.

The SDAT team found Albany to be a “beautiful and distinguished city, in a wonderful natural setting, with strong urban fabric, [with] promising economy and institutions, and an active and concerned citizenry.” To that end, we hope that Mayor Sheehan will find the recommendations presented in this report useful and that some may come to fruition.

The subcommittee formed breakout groups to address the following broad challenges to Neighborhood Development:

- Inconsistent Rules and Arbitrary Enforcement
- Vacant and Abandoned Buildings
- Obstacles to Small-business Development
- Historic Preservation Is Often Viewed as Burden, Not an Economic Resource
- Alternative Transportation – Pedestrian and Cycling Barriers
- Quality-of-Life Issues

Assets

Albany is a city rich in history, with magnificent architecture and “good bones” as far as urban planning is concerned. As the **AllOverAlbany** blog editors noted in their assessment of the Albany 2030 Plan, *“Albany aims to become a prosperous, diverse, well-educated, safe city, ready for climate change, with a mixed-use downtown and neighborhood centers, where people walk more and drive less.”* The city already has some tools at its disposal that can help advance these goals:

- **SeeClickFix:** This recently developed online tool allows anyone to report and track non-emergency issues anywhere in the city via the Internet. It empowers citizens, community groups, media organizations, and governments to take care of and improve their neighborhoods. Its use should be continued and promoted.
- **Vacant Buildings Court:** Property owners who are not in compliance with the city’s maintenance requirements were once summoned to vacant building court, which is usually held the third Wednesday of each month.
- **Performance Audits:** Reports made by City Auditor Leif Engstrom on the performance of various city departments should be reviewed and recommendations for improvements should be followed.

Overview of Goals and Recommendations

Zoning/Codes/Vacant Buildings

Goal 1: Develop a Vacant, Neglected and Abandoned Property Strategic Plan

Goal 2: Create a “one-stop shop” for project permitting

Goal 3: Update municipal code to facilitate desired development outcomes

Goal 4: Improve code compliance by focusing on education rather than penalties

Historic Preservation/Planning

Goal 5: Promote the Historic Preservation Ordinance to remove barriers to investment

Goal 6: Develop a comprehensive Preservation Plan to identify priority projects

Small-business Development/Transportation/Walkability

Goal 7: Make small-business development a priority for Albany

Goal 8: Offer a Small-business Development Incentive

Goal 9: Create walkable destinations and establish links to key business corridors

Goal 10: Create an “emerald necklace” of open spaces in Albany

Neighborhood Associations/Quality of Life/Marketing

Goal 11: Level the playing field – make every neighborhood a desirable place to live

Goal 12: Enhance neighborhood links to employers and job opportunities

Goal 13: Improve Albany’s image: in its neighborhoods, the region, and beyond; educate realtors and large employers about Albany’s housing options

Goal 14: Provide incentives for diverse housing stock and encourage aging in place

Goal 15: Enhance the quality of life in Albany’s diverse neighborhoods

ZONING/CODES/VACANT BUILDINGS

Goal 1: Develop a Vacant, Neglected and Abandoned Property Strategic Plan

Albany must take meaningful steps to decrease vacant buildings and lots throughout the city with the ultimate goal of putting property back on the tax rolls, improving the city, and revitalizing neighborhoods.

Strategies to meet Goal 1:

- a. (Short Term) – The plan should be developed and implemented in conjunction with a Task Force that **includes residents, developers, financial institutions, government leaders, not-for-profit agencies, and other stakeholders**. The strategic plan and implementation strategy should:
 - Prioritize and target key vacant, neglected and abandoned properties for housing and commercial development;
 - Partner with local employers and institutions to create incentives to encourage qualified employees and renters to purchase homes in targeted areas;
 - Provide home ownership seminars for new and prospective home owners to educate residents in the rules and responsibilities of homeownership. Involve realtors, banks, and neighborhood associations.
 - Encourage the development and use of mortgage assistance programs, the Community Loan Fund, the Home Store, and other programs that support the development of vacant, neglected and abandoned properties;
 - Establish tax abatements and other incentives for developers of vacant property who will target housing to low-income workers, especially those earning minimum wage;

- Facilitate and incentivize the rapid transfer of property in foreclosure by alerting financial institutions to problem properties, publicizing Vacant Building Court, and identifying other potential solutions;
 - Work with community stakeholders to encourage innovative reuse of vacant properties (urban agriculture, community gardens, side-lot acquisition incentives that recoup costs of demolition, vacant lot stabilization, playgrounds, urban landscaping, etc.);
 - Incorporate elements of the Neighborhood Revitalization Strategic Plan and the 2030 Albany Plan;
 - Identify and target buildings for demolition through an open and transparent process;
 - Assign a staff member to be responsible for implementation of the strategic plan, convening regular meetings of the Vacant and Abandoned Properties Task Force, identifying and engaging community partners, and assisting and educating current and prospective property owners on the resources available and options to improve deteriorated, vacant, and abandoned property.
- b. (Short Term) – When a building can’t be rehabilitated, **consider training city workers to conduct demolitions** rather than using contractors. Cost savings should be dedicated to emergency stabilization, shoring and tarping of vacant buildings with rehabilitation potential.
 - c. (Short Term) – Consistently enforce **building and zoning codes to improve housing quality** and prevent deterioration of buildings and neighborhoods; strategically use fines to encourage development of property.
 - d. (Mid Term) – **Encourage the quick development of property through financial incentives** such as fee waivers and short-term tax abatements as permits are granted and certificates of occupancy issued.
 - e. (Mid Term) – Implement a **strategic acquisition and land banking program** to combat and reverse decline of vacant property in partnership with other agencies.
 - f. (Mid Term) – **Adopt a rehabilitation building code** that allows greater flexibility in the restoration or rehabilitation of existing structures based on the International Existing Building Code, to encourage reuse rather than demolition.

Goal 2: Create a “One Stop Shop” for project permitting

The city must make the permit-application and project-development process as easy as possible for residents, businesses, and developers while continuing to protect and preserve our neighborhoods.

Strategies to meet Goal 2:

- a. (Short Term) **Develop a comprehensive Land Use Strategy** for the City of Albany, incorporating the Planning Department, Building Department and Historic Resources Commission.
- b. (Short Term) – **Coordinate the efforts of the Planning and Building Departments**, perhaps in a single location. Consider a concierge approach where one person is responsible for facilitating and monitoring a project from start to finish.
- c. (Short Term) – **Consolidate permitting functions and regulatory review processes**. This is essential for the creation of a functional “one-stop shop,” and should also include an overall

simplification and clarification of applications and ensure that such applications are only requesting necessary data.

- d. (Short Term) – **Improve communication between the staff and the public.** Establish times when Planning and Building Department staff is available to consult with homeowners, businesses, and developers to clarify requirements, including outside of regular business hours.
- e. (Short Term) – **Add a list of licensed contractors** (e.g. electricians, plumbers, excavators, etc.) **to the city's website**, and make the list available to applicants.
- f. (Short Term) – Establish a process, through surveys or other methods, to **routinely secure and use customer feedback.**
- g. (Long Term) – **Spell out the reasoning behind policies to ensure that they are interpreted and implemented consistently**, make sure these explanations are available to staff and citizens.
- h. (Long Term) – Establish clear **policies regarding interpretations of the code.**

Goal 3: Update municipal code to facilitate desired development outcomes

The city must adopt smart growth strategies to modify confusing, compartmentalized, vague, and obsolete zoning and code provisions that stand in the way of desired development. We need to rewrite our code in such a way that we get what we want, instead of constantly trying to modify the square peg to fit the round hole.

Strategies to meet Goal 3:

- a. (Short Term) – Generate a list of local code and zoning provisions that create unnecessary barriers or provide ineffective protections for appropriate and desired development. **Create a means to address unnecessary, excessively rigorous, or deficient codes** and develop a process for facilitating immediate legislative changes whenever possible.
- b. (Short Term) – **Encourage feedback from customers** to help identify and correct unnecessary, redundant, obsolete, obstructive, irrelevant, or inefficient zoning and code requirements or processes.
- c. (Mid Term) – **Pursue the development of a new zoning code** in accordance with the Albany 2030 Comprehensive Plan and include purpose statements within the code to ensure proper interpretation.

Goal 4: Improve code compliance by focusing on education rather than penalties

The city should strive to humanize interactions with code-enforcement personnel to increase the potential for achieving code compliance in a cooperative and constructive manner while protecting existing housing stock and our neighborhoods.

Strategies to meet Goal 4:

- a. (Short Term) -- **Develop educational materials that clearly explain property and building maintenance codes**; develop policies for distributing codes material and working with property owners to understand and implement them. **Have a systematic approach rather than a reactive approach** to violations, and make expectations clear to violators.
- b. (Short Term) – **For repeat offenders, increase fines for code violations.** Use a database to target

such offenders.

- c. (Mid Term) – **Acknowledge landlords who do an exemplary job** of improving and maintaining properties.
- d. (Long Term) – **Make better use of data to identify trends, history, and knowledge of properties and situations.** The process of addressing a code violation should be clear from initial citation to resolution, and staff and violators should be able to identify the status of a potential violation at any time in the process.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION/PLANNING

Goal 5: Promote the Historic Preservation Ordinance as a tool to remove barriers to investment

Albany – an historic city, and the second oldest chartered city in the nation – needs strategic, thoughtful management of its built environment. Albany’s historic fabric is among the city’s most promising – and to date, largely untapped – economic development assets. The city should actively promote understanding of the Historic Resource Ordinance for residents and other investors in order to avoid misunderstandings and foster greater investment in historic neighborhoods.

Strategies to meet Goal 5:

- a. (Short Term) – Appoint **new members to the Historic Resource Commission** (HRC) as current commissioners’ terms expire. All members should be trained in the application of the existing ordinance and their role in interpreting and upholding its regulations in a clear and consistent manner. Ensure that all applicants are treated as valued customers and potential investors in our city.
- b. (Mid Term) – Develop **detailed informational material** to explain the rules that pertain to Albany’s Historic Districts, and distribute it to property owners and tenants in historic districts, neighborhood associations and the public. By providing clarity to developers, neighborhood residents, and other potential investors, the city will encourage revitalization in neighborhoods that could generate additional outside investment. This strategy has been adopted in most cities that have a strong and effective economic development strategy geared toward retaining character and existing building fabric. This task should be spearheaded by the Historic Resources Commission.

Goal 6: Develop a comprehensive Preservation Plan to identify priority projects

The city must clarify the important role of preservation in creating a diverse, walkable, attractive, and economically sound small city. This will allow the city to identify priority projects and neighborhoods and utilize outside funding, such as tax credits.

Strategies to meet Goal 6:

- a. (Short Term) – As new hiring is done within the planning department, **a staff person with a strong preservation-planning** background should be sought to augment the existing role of preservation planner, who reviews applications and serves as staff to the HRC. Albany’s history and architecture are its greatest marketable assets. As such, comprehensive preservation

planning should play a central role in the city. In many neighborhoods, good urban planning *is* preservation planning.

- b. (Mid Term) – **Adopt graduated preservation standards** to enable the wide range of neighborhoods and buildings within historic districts to be treated fairly and equitably, while taking into account existing realities of disinvestment, loss of fabric, and range of architectural significance. This strategy will require clear distinctions and boundaries, and should be undertaken alongside a rationalizing of existing historic district boundaries, and the addition of new districts to enable more projects to take part in the NYS Rehabilitation Tax Credit Program and other incentives.
- c. (Long Term) – The city should **develop a comprehensive preservation plan** to ensure that the diverse character of our historic buildings and neighborhoods is renewed rather than lost, while at the same time allowing for change and redevelopment. Preservation of architectural and historic resources should be recognized as a tool to help reach the goals of attracting new residents and development dollars at all levels of city government.

SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT/TRANSPORTATION/WALKABILITY

Goal 7: Make small-business and retail development a priority for Albany

The city must increase jobs, revenue and quality of life in the city by making the growth of new and existing small businesses a priority of the administration.

Strategies to meet Goal 7:

- a. (Short Term) – **Establish Neighborhood Economic Development Zones** to create thriving commercial areas, successful neighborhood businesses, and equitable access to quality jobs.
- b. (Short Term) – **Create a “one-stop shop” for project permitting** by moving Planning and Building departments into one location. A single entity in a single location should be responsible for seeing a project along from start to finish.
- c. (Short Term) – **Emphasize small business both in rhetoric and action.** Create and talk about small-business development goals, metrics, and job growth. Make a point of frequenting, using, and referring to small businesses in the city, and avoid ribbon-cutting as the sole interaction between the Mayor’s Office and the small-business community.
- d. Working jointly with private real estate brokers, develop a **Small-business Information Directory** of sources of available commercial spaces, potential commercial spaces, market needs/community desires, available resources, and types of permits needed to establish a business in Albany.
- e. (Mid Term) – Within the “one-stop shop” create a **Small-business Counselor or Development Review Center**, to help small businesses navigate Planning and Code requirements, community based needs, and other resources in the private and public sectors.
- f. (Mid Term) – **Change the fee and permit structure for small businesses to ensure that desirable features are encouraged** (patios, cafes, and store signage) and that less desirable features (impermeable surfaces, curb cuts, vacant buildings) are discouraged.

- g. (Long Term) – Embrace creativity. Seek out and cater to alternative small-business models in ways that other cities don't. To foster cottage industries and non-brick-and-mortar businesses, **remove barriers to home-based businesses that are consistent with neighborhood character**, prioritize creation of cooperative spaces and low-cost storefronts (especially to fill vacant space), and ease restrictions on non-traditional businesses.
- h. (Long Term) – **Bring full-service grocery stores to underserved neighborhoods** through partnerships with The Food Trust and the Low Income Investment Fund. Model the Capital District Community Gardens *Healthy Convenience Store Initiative* efforts to bring fresh produce to neighborhood convenience stores.
- i. (Long Term) – **Develop an Urban Agriculture Plan** to foster efforts to grow and consume more fresh, sustainably produced, and locally grown foods.

Goal 8: Create Small-business Development Incentives

Strategies to meet Goal 8:

- a. (Mid Term) – Offer tax abatements for **conversion of vacant buildings to commercial space** (specifically in neighborhoods with an identified commercial need).
- b. (Mid Term) – **Offer incentives to attract desired businesses** to a particular neighborhood or commercial hub.
- c. (Long Term) – Offer **tax abatements for those who rent property to businesses that are desired in a neighborhood**, but that often have trouble becoming established, such as bookstores or cafés. Require these property owners to control the cost of rent over the term of the abatement in order to provide time for the business to become stable.

Goal 9: Create walkable destinations and establish links to business corridors

Strategies to meet Goal 9:

- a. (Short Term) – **Offer incentives to upgrade walkable commercial corridors and the “anchors” that made them special** (corner lots, small niche businesses, historic buildings, etc.) Pursue matching grants to offer bike racks, façade painting and improvements, new signs, lighting, and outdoor seating. Target commercial centers near affordable housing stock.
- b. (Short Term) – Ensure that major development projects such as the proposed Convention Center and the Wellington Row are not viewed as standalone efforts, but rather as an opportunity to **integrate new development with adjacent residential or commercial areas**.
- c. (Short Term) – Albany's size makes it a good candidate for becoming a thoroughly walkable city. **Engage a consultant to conduct a walkability study** to identify areas for improvement and increase the number of pedestrians and cyclists.
- d. (Short Term) – Secure Federal or State funds to **implement the Madison Avenue Road Diet** recommendations.
- e. (Short Term) – City leadership should **support alternative transportation by example**.
- f. (Mid Term) – Advocate for **universal CDTA access for college students** as a means of reducing traffic congestion and parking demand.

- g. (Mid Term) – Enhance **pedestrian and bicycle access to the Hudson Riverfront** and Mohawk-Hudson River Trail.
- h. (Mid Term) – Use **Complete Streets legislation** adopted by Common Council to ensure that transportation projects consider the convenient access and mobility of all users: pedestrians, cyclists, and transit riders.
- i. (Mid Term) – Promote a **better understanding of parking rules and restrictions** throughout the city, online and with clear signage.
- j. (Long Term) – **Adopt urban design standards and guidelines to support alternative means of transportation** (pedestrian, bicycle, transit, and alternative fuel vehicles.)
- k. (Long Term) – **All streets should be green streets** incorporating bioswales, bike lanes, and transit first options.
- l. (Long Term) – Have a **controlled, measured, and quantitative plan for transportation changes and expansion**. Require large institutions and large development projects to craft Travel Demand Management Plans.
- m. (Long Term) – Develop an **intermodal transportation center downtown** (see Providence, Pittsburgh). Work with CDTA and other providers to offer connections among local/regional bus services, Amtrak, and Albany International Airport.

Goal 10: Create an “emerald necklace” of open spaces in Albany

Strategies to meet Goal 10:

- a. (Short Term) – Washington Park has become a nexus for cross-town and highway bound traffic in the city, posing an increased threat to cyclists and pedestrians. **Reduce the speed of cars going through Washington Park, and develop bike lanes.**
- b. (Mid Term) – **Build connections among existing green spaces currently cut off by I-87 and I-787** (Normanskill Farm, Albany Municipal Golf Course) by enhancing bike and transit access.
- c. (Mid Term) – Create a **plan for bicycle infrastructure**, with goals and targets. Focus on roads that are already being underutilized by cars.
- d. (Mid Term) – Explore naming opportunities with insurance companies, medical practices, hospitals to **secure corporate sponsors for bike lanes** and other improvements.

NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS/QUALITY OF LIFE/MARKETING

Goal 11: Level the playing field for Albany’s neighborhoods

The city must work to make each neighborhood a desirable place to live because of its walkable streets, historic architecture, range of housing choices, mixed-use neighborhood centers, schools, parks and recreation facilities, and easy access to job opportunities.

Strategies to meet Goal 11:

- a. (Short Term) – **Appoint a Neighborhood Community Liaison** who reports directly to the mayor to convey the needs and concerns of the distinct neighborhoods of Albany.

- b. (Short Term) – Create a **rational special-events parking plan** for residents who live in neighborhoods that host large city or regional events, making it easier—and desirable—to live in these neighborhoods. The city must lead and support a mindset shift away from a negative “This is what you get” for living in certain neighborhoods and toward an understanding that residents and local businesses are an important part of making neighborhoods desirable places to hold events, and that reasonable provisions should be made to ease parking and access burdens.
- c. (Mid Term) – Provide customer service training to front-line staff in all departments to **ensure that every citizen’s concerns are** addressed.
- d. (Mid Term) – Establish official staff connections between organized neighborhood groups and the Department of Development and Planning.

Goal 12: Enhance neighborhood links to employers and job opportunities

Albany is the region’s center of government, education, healthcare, employment, and the arts. Quality of life in the city of Albany is directly linked to the ability of residents to obtain meaningful employment to sustain their families and community.

Strategies to meet Goal 12:

- a. (Short Term) – **Promote businesses that prioritize hiring local** residents. Convene a job fair, provide recognition by Mayor Sheehan and/or Common Council with monthly/quarterly plaque or certificate, and feature on City website.
- b. (Mid Term) – **Institute Community Benefits Agreements** for new development, to ensure that certain conditions like local hiring are met.
- c. (Mid Term) – **Foster “Hire at Home” initiatives with major existing employers in the city of Albany.** Participants might receive tuition assistance with paid time off to study and take classes. In exchange, they agree to work at their sponsoring employer for up to 4 years after graduation.
- d. (Mid Term) – Establish a **Neighborhood Jobs Trust** to ensure that large-scale real estate development in Albany delivers direct benefits to neighborhood residents in the form of jobs, job training and related services. Consider the City of Boston Neighborhood Jobs Trust as an example.⁵
- e. (Long Term) –Incentivize the development of job training programs that **prepare local residents for employment opportunities** within the city of Albany. Consider the “Evergreen Cooperatives” model in Cleveland. It identifies services needed by large institutions (laundry, energy, and food) and then grows those services in the city, employing people who need jobs.
- f. (Long Term) – **Increase transit connectivity between and among city neighborhoods and employment centers.**

⁵ In Boston, commercial construction projects in excess of 100,000 square feet pay a jobs linkage fee, based on square footage, to the Neighborhood Jobs Trust. Developers have two options for this. Through a Job Contribution Grant whereby the developer simply makes a payment to the Trust; or through a Jobs Creation Contribution, whereby after making payment to the Trust, the developer may request that linkage funds be used to create a job training program for workers who will be employed, on a permanent basis, at the development project.

Goal 13: Improve Albany’s image in its neighborhoods, the region, and beyond; educate realtors and large employers about Albany’s housing options

The city must strive to build neighborhood identity, connections, and sense of community across neighborhood lines. Maintain distinct, safe, quality neighborhoods that preserve the natural beauty, historic and architectural character, and cultural diversity of Albany.

Strategies to meet Goal 13:

- a. (Short Term) – Promote the use **of interactive web-based tools, social media and promotional videos for sharing information about neighborhoods** and engaging the public and marketing in public places like hotel TV systems, movie theaters, waiting rooms, etc.
- b. (Short Term) – **Develop simple marketing materials** that clearly explain any neighborhood incentives/grant programs that encourage home ownership for qualified candidates.
- c. (Mid Term) – Engage a marketing consultant to **develop a city-wide marketing strategy** that will enable us to “tell the story of Albany” better and increase the knowledge of the positive things Albany has to offer individuals and families.
- d. (Mid Term) – **Develop promotional materials for realtors and major employers to encourage marketing the City of Albany as a viable living option** for new hires and to introduce our city to out-of-town people. Collaborate with major institutions to include this literature in the welcome packages they prepare for new employees who are moving to the Capital Region.
- e. (Mid Term) –**Support the continuation of Neighborhood level forums** to address potential plans and impacts of institutions on adjacent neighborhoods. This would encourage institutions to work with the city and community stakeholders early in project planning to address potential concerns.
- f. (Long Term) –Inventory each neighborhood to **establish baseline city-wide community assessments of problems (vacant buildings, crime) as well as resources (community institutions, employers).**

Goal 14: Provide incentives for diverse housing stock, encourage aging in place

The city should work to removing barriers to aging in place and foster the growth of NORCs—Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities—such as the Whitehall Road Corridor.

Strategies to meet Goal 14:

- a. (Short Term) – Incentivize middle-class homeownership in targeted areas to **improve economic diversity and economic stability in distressed areas.**
- b. (Mid Term) – Maintain intergenerational/lifecycle housing options that meet the needs of all age groups.
- c. (Long Term) – Encourage non-profit and for-profit developers to **design senior housing that is integrated into the neighborhood.**

Goal 15: Enhance the quality of life for Albany's diverse neighborhoods

Investments in prompt graffiti removal, street cleaning, and beautification efforts, such as plantings and street trees can spur reinvestment in struggling neighborhoods.

Strategies to meet Goal 15:

- a. (Short Term) – **Leverage public/private partnerships to support the cost of quality of life investments.** Seek corporate sponsors for a second Graffiti Van and to invest in street trees.
- b. (Mid Term) – **Undertake a city-wide signage inventory**, and once all current and needed way making is assessed, work with University at Albany Planning Department students, Partners for Albany Stories, and other creative stakeholders to **redesign, fabricate, and install new signage that is clear, attractive, and informational.**
- c. (Mid Term) – **Develop an anti-littering campaign**, such as the one that was used in Albany in the 1970s and 1980s. Trash receptacles should be numerous, and easily used, identified, and emptied. Fine out-of-town violators who use them for household trash.
- d. (Mid Term) – Noise is defined as unwanted sound. Whether from late-night bars, loud stereo systems, car alarms or motorcycles, it's not good for a neighborhood's health. **Develop a plan to reduce excessive noise** in the city's neighborhoods by exploring methods others cities have used to successfully control noise.

Economic Development and Job Creation

Co-chairs

John Bulgaro

Mike Fancher

Ellen Sax

Jeff Sperry

Transition Team Members

Steve Bills

Hon. Neil Breslin

Randy Collins

Lissa D'Aquanni

Mike D'Attilio

Lee Eck

José Filomeno

Anthony Fresina

Dennis Gaffney

Alan Goldberg

Ted Kolankowski

Deryl McCray

Philip Morris

Adrienne Nadoraski

Bill Newman

Hon. Anthony Owens

Seth Rosenblum

Georgette Steffens

Mary Sullivan

F. Michael Tucker

Mike Whalen

Introduction

It is the enthusiastic desire of the subcommittee to recommend goals and specific strategies that address Albany's challenges and leverage its assets towards creating economic opportunity and access for all residents of the city. Focusing on partnerships, networks, and inclusiveness, it is the intent to realize the tremendous potential of Albany and make it a more vibrant, environmentally sustainable, walkable, and socially equitable place to live, work, and play. Stakeholder buy-in, in the broadest sense, has to be at the core of any and all initiatives to improve the city's employment opportunities, neighborhoods, downtown, gateways to the city, waterfront, and cultural offerings. The subcommittee hopes the recommendations and strategies presented here can be used as input for the City Tactical Plan being conducted by Goody Clancy consultants.

Challenges

As a capital city, Albany faces many of the challenges of other state capitals throughout the country. One of the city's most difficult challenges is the concentration of government and non-profit entities located in the city, which results in an insufficient percentage of taxable real property with which to support the delivery of city services.

Compounding the problem of the high level of tax-exempt property are the cutbacks and physical office consolidations of the government and non-profit sectors, which have in turn resulted in increasing vacancy rates in the privately owned downtown commercial office buildings. This phenomenon negatively impacts the city's tax base, as building owners apply for lower property-tax assessments for their vacant commercial office buildings. The end result has been a decrease in commercial property tax values and an increase in the number of vacant, partially used or abandoned buildings.

Despite the significant gains the city has made in recent years in growing technology-related employment, these developments have not been felt citywide. Post-recession high unemployment and poverty rates persist in Albany, particularly in the economically distressed neighborhoods and among minority residents and especially young, recent graduates. It is clear that the many city, county, state, and non-profit economic development agencies created to address these issues are not currently effectively coordinated or organized in a way that grows the city's tax base or creates economic opportunity for all city residents.

Assets

Albany has been a model and the envy of other municipalities around the country as the cradle of the explosive growth in nanotechnology, particularly as it applies to the semiconductor research and manufacturing industry. The Albany-based College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering (CNSE) has created the critical mass that encouraged the development of thousands of jobs in the city and has attracted billions of dollars in governmental support and private-sector-sponsored research. This has resulted in a high-tech employment and a real-estate building boom on the city's western border, adjacent to the University at Albany.

Complementing and contrasting this internationally renowned high-tech development is the city's unique, varied, and inherently valuable concentration of historically significant neighborhoods and building stock, some dating back to the early nineteenth century. Furthermore, Albany offers significant arts and cultural organizations that add to the quality of life for residents, commuters, and visitors. In addition, Albany enjoys a concentration of major health care centers and institutions of higher education located in the city, resulting in a populace with some of the highest educational attainment levels in the country. This so-called "creative class" is essential to drive new businesses and strengthen the cultural fabric of the city.

The pallet upon which all this resides is the natural beauty of the city's surrounding landscape and convenient geography. Albany is fortunate to be situated on the majestic Hudson River and with its position and proximity to the Erie Canal has been an historic transportation hub since the city was founded 390 years ago. Further, Albany is in convenient proximity to world-class cities like New York, Boston, and Montreal, but is also nestled in between the Adirondack, Catskill, and Berkshire mountains, providing Albany residents proximity to environmental beauty, recreational outlets, and sporting options. To secure the brightest possible future for Albany and all its citizens, these assets must be thoughtfully leveraged, invested in, and protected.

An additional asset is Governor Andrew M. Cuomo’s blueprint for economic growth, focusing on the empowerment of New York State’s regions, with the establishment of Regional Economic Development Councils. The Capital Region Economic Development Council (CREDC), reorganized in 2013 to invigorate community input and drive collaboration, was successful in the statewide competition by producing an integrated strategy for regional economic growth that recognizes the importance of our urban centers. Thanks to the Governor’s approach, there is now wider recognition that regional economic growth requires alignment of economic, community, workforce, and technology development resources that are deployed under a strategic Implementation Plan with an Opportunity Agenda for our underserved citizens.

Overview of Goals and Recommendations

Goal 1: Streamline, empower, and coordinate economic-development efforts

Goal 2: Facilitate entrepreneurial and small-business growth and development

Goal 3: Make a top-level commitment to linking Albany residents with jobs in the city

Goal 4: Improve the quality of life in neighborhoods by making them safe, attractive, and walkable.

Goal 5: Expand residential and commercial development

Goal 6: Attract and retain high-growth sectors to locate operations in Downtown Albany

Goals and Strategies

Goal 1: Streamline, empower, and coordinate city-wide economic-development efforts with State and County Agencies and programs.

The development and implementation of economic development projects in Albany is currently supported to varying degrees by five distinct economic development entities: Capitalize Albany Corporation (CAC), The City of Albany IDA (IDA), Albany Parking Authority (APA), Albany Convention Center Authority (ACCA), and Albany Community Development Agency (ACDA). In addition there are several other county and state non-profit economic development agencies, not the least of which is the highly successful Capital Regional Economic Development Council.

While each of these entities has a particular focus, many economic-development projects generally involve actions by more than one of these entities, resulting in multiple board reviews, approvals with non-standardized project assessment criteria, and competing or multiple priorities. This dynamic often results in businesses sponsors and city staff spending inordinate time and attention on navigating the bureaucracy rather than on proactive project administration.

Similarly, development projects confront significant risks associated with navigating the state and local project reviews and approvals, including, at the local level, building codes, zoning, and other department cross-over and, at the state level, historic preservation, etc. Compounding these delays, there is no clear, single point for applicants to access municipal forms and documents, receive updates on project

review status, or interact with state agencies in efficient web-based processes.

Strategies to meet Goal 1:

- a. Call for the creation of a “Capital City Development Corporation” to consolidate, where practical, economic-development agencies (such as the Capitalize Albany Corporation, City of Albany IDA, Albany County IDA, Albany Convention Center Authority, and the Albany Community Development Corporation) to maximize the advantages each organization offers and streamline project review and approval process. This consolidation would result in clearer paths for projects, more efficient operation of staff efforts, shortened timelines, and reduced perceived risk associated with undertaking a project in the city.
- b. The Capital City Development Corporation would be specifically empowered to expedite projects through efficient sharing of project information (building codes, zoning, etc.), review conflicting requirements, develop clear requirements and policies, and manage concurrent review by each departmental focus area. (A dedicated income stream for the Capital City Development Corporation could be created by 1) continuing Albany Convention Center Authority hotel room assessment and 2) a project impact assessment fee to be paid by developers seeking assistance from the Corporation similar to the Town of Colonie’s.)
- c. Cultivate a customer-service culture within city government to ensure employees and policies support investing in the city of Albany. The Capital City Development Corporation would provide concierge service to applicants to prepare their file for financial and project review and would provide secure access to each project developer for online tracking of their proposal with respect to outstanding information requests, receipt of requested information and how long the project has been under review, providing accountability for agency actions.
- d. Improve transparency of project-development processes with establishment of a single City of Albany web portal where the review and approval process is clearly described, including online access to all regulations, forms, and documents.
- e. Use readily available technology solutions (such as Drop Box) for transmittal of information and file development for each agency to concurrently review a project rather than sequential review.
- f. Launch a city-wide public relations and re-branding campaign to attract residents and business back to the city. This coordinated campaign would be supported by all city agencies and programs.

Goal 2: Facilitate entrepreneurial and small-business growth and development.

“Economic gardening” refers to growing a city’s economy from within by retaining and assisting second stage companies, while creating a business-friendly environment for local entrepreneurs. The goal here is to bring economic gardening to the city of Albany by focusing on the development/expansion of entrepreneurialism and small businesses, which can grow into bigger businesses committed to the city’s growth, development, and vibrancy.

The Association for Enterprise Opportunity (AEO) recently released a report stating that microbusinesses (fewer than 5 employees) represent 92 percent of all U.S. businesses, account for 26 million jobs, and

can be a pathway to success for women and people of color in underserved communities. When we look at job creation, it is essential that we address strategies for city residents who are under or unemployed.

Strategies to meet Goal 2:

- a. Identify technology start-up incubator and low-cost retail space to encourage business formation within the City's neighborhoods.
- b. Establish a knowledgeable, business-friendly, and customer-service-trained point person/ombudsman/concierge to shepherd all new businesses through the various regulations and to make sure they have access to the information and resources they need to set up shop and be successful, including BIDS, nonprofits, financing, training. (e.g., Watervliet received CDBG funding for micro-enterprise training and capital grants to support the development and growth of micro-enterprises. Cohoes is known as "business friendly" because City Hall is easy to navigate.)
- c. Launch a retail/marketing/attraction campaign to support larger projects (convention center, tech/large businesses & residential development) – focus on enticing downtown retail including a mix of national retailers as well as local retailers anchor.
- d. Reconstitute the City Arts Council which would make funding recommendations to the Capital City Development Corporation for City based arts and cultural organizations.

Goal 3: Make a top-level commitment to linking Albany residents with jobs in the city, particularly those from underserved communities.

According to the City's Local Advisory Report to the Capital Region Economic Development Council, "preparing and connecting the local workforce with quality, well-paying job opportunities is the highest priority indicated during public engagement forums in the City of Albany. Harnessing the power and resources of employment training, recruitment and placement programs is at the forefront for driving the local economy." (October 2011)

Furthermore, among Albany's top education challenges is a growing concern that underserved and low-income communities—including women, minorities, and persons with disabilities—are not being reached with the information and resources to cultivate the skills needed to participate and earn a living in the 21st-century workforce, including the rapidly growing high-technology sector in the Capital Region. It is a quiet crisis of undeveloped and underutilized human capital. This population is "the new majority," a talent pool that is largely untapped and significantly under-represented in science and engineering. It is imperative to engage the "new majority" in science and engineering education as a vital component in an education, workforce strategy and as a new source of economic growth.

To this end, key issues that need to be addressed and improved include workforce training, transportation, and childcare.

Strategies to meet Goal 3:

- a. Expand opportunities for Small, Minority, & Women-owned Business Enterprises (SMWBE) with tailored programs by establishing neighborhood outreach nodes at libraries and other targeted

facilities (e.g., Capital South Center) that are tightly coupled to economic-development strategies leading to employment and SMWBE growth opportunities. SMWBE education and business development services would be made available at these nodes with online support and periodic outreach and educational presentations leading to expanded opportunities under Governor Cuomo's MWBE participation goals.

- b. Couple high-tech workforce learning programs with strategic industry skill needs by establishing neighborhood-based nodes in underserved communities that are connected to learning hubs (e.g. Capital South Campus Center project currently under construction connected to CNSE) resulting in the recent award of funding by the Capital Region Economic Development Council to establish a new "Advanced Technology and Information Networking (ATTAIN) laboratory; SUNY's Albany Promise with "Cradle to Career" support; etc.) . Make available to Albany citizens tools capable of assessing skill levels, identifying skill strengths and weaknesses, offering appropriate training programs, conducting employment certifications, and identifying employment opportunities.
- c. Create a dedicated position to coordinate all the various public and private job training/employment programs and services and make the entire system more accessible, user-friendly, and effective for Albany residents.
- d. Work with large local employers to develop/expand/coordinate current training programs to include city residents (e.g. Albany Med's Grow Our Own program that provides training to current employees to become RNs).
- e. Develop enhanced public transportation options for those in need, such as car sharing programs. Currently, a quarter of Albany households do not own a car or a means of traveling to jobs located throughout the region.
- f. Designate staff to serve as a referral/clearinghouse for child care resources available to people who work in the City.
- g. Re-design summer youth program to include soft skill (e.g., how to interview) and job skill development.
- h. Establish a policy framework through which businesses that receive City economic development services agree to make best efforts to hire Albany residents as a condition of the support they receive.
- i. Designate staff to coordinate with the NYS DOL's Workforce Investment Board (WIB) to identify training needs of City-based businesses and match them to training of City residents.

Goal 4: Improve the quality of life in city neighborhoods by making them safe, attractive, and walkable, and transform Albany into a place where more people want to live, work, and play.

According to the City's 2030 Plan's Vision for Safe, Livable Neighborhoods, "Every neighborhood in Albany is a desirable place to live because of its walkable streets, historic architecture, range of housing choices, mixed-use neighborhood centers, quality schools, parks and recreation facilities, and easy access to Downtown Albany and other job centers."

Still, with all of these assets, an improved quality of life is critical to protecting them while also attracting three large demographics over which cities are competing: Millennials, retirees, and commuters.

Enticing these groups to reside within the city would have big benefits: a larger tax base and increased revenues, stimulated economic development because of an increase in the customer base, and a contribution toward more environmentally stable communities.

Strategies to meet Goal 4:

- a. Create road diets/traffic calming measures for major arteries in Albany, including Madison, Central, Washington, Western, Henry Johnson, and New Scotland Avenue. Change focus from a commuter city to a residential city (many major arteries aren't walkable or bikeable).
- b. Prioritize plan development/funding for an easily accessible recreational waterfront with a diversity of events/activities, by pursuing a community boathouse, building a regional bike trail by connecting the Helderberg Rail Trail to the Mohawk Hudson Bike Path, and creating a Livingston Ave. Rail Bridge Walkway to Rensselaer.
- c. Accelerate the creation of the city's bike infrastructure by adding highly visible, safe, and attractive bike lanes as a way to attract Millennials, who are foregoing cars and want cities that are bicycle friendly.
- d. Set a goal of attaining ubiquitous high speed internet access for every home and business in Albany through the expansion of Albany FreeNet's WiFi network.
- e. Focus on developing mixed use at the old convention center site and downtown in general, emphasizing retail and market-rate housing, with a focal point, such as an historical draw, botanical garden, or a mix of educational and entertainment attractions.
- f. Bolster commercial districts by closing streets temporarily, creating temporary plazas and streetparks, which can be done quickly and cheaply and stimulate commercial development, as has been done in NYC.
- g. Develop a public relations/marketing strategy to encourage people to live, work & play here.
- h. Promote urban agriculture working with Community Gardens and the Cornell Cooperative extension, such as limited livestock and community gardens, and pursue a full-fledged Farmers Market in the City.
- i. Investigate new funding streams to continue the support of the arts and cultural organizations which help drive economic development in the City including networking partnerships and collaboration with educational institutions;
- j. Promote and support artist live/work space in neighborhoods throughout the City following the model of "The Barn" project in the Arbor Hill neighborhood.

Goal 5: Expand residential and commercial development.

According to Albany's 2030 Comprehensive Plan, "Retaining current and attracting new residents to Albany depends on the availability of quality housing choices that meet the needs of residents at different income levels and at different stages in their lifecycles." Recognizing that Albany's population has declined from 134,995 in 1950 to 97,856 in 2010, the city needs to expand the quality housing stock throughout the city, especially in downtown and disadvantaged neighborhoods. Quality housing will attract more residents to the city, especially the two largest demographic groups seeking urban residences: retirees and Millennials. More people in Albany will expand the city's tax base, make the city's streets safer by putting more people on them, and also providing more customers to support local

businesses.

Strategies to meet Goal 5:

- a. Coordinate with the County of Albany on creating the land bank of vacant properties.
- b. Increase delinquent real estate tax collection while pushing for a shorter foreclosure process.
- c. Prioritize and support the development of market-rate housing within the Central Business District
- d. Use local financial institutions to help create funding for the redevelopment of single and two family housing throughout the City.

Goal 6: Attract and retain high-growth sectors to locate operations in Downtown Albany.

As the capital city of New York State, the seat of Albany County, and the central hub of the tri-city/four-county region, Albany has a high proportion of federal office, state agency headquarters, and local government public authorities encompassing the entire spectrum of smart cities and governmental services from transportation (e.g., NYS DOT, Thruway Authority, Canal Corporation, Capital District Transportation and Port Authorities, Amtrak and CSX); healthcare (e.g., NYS DOH and Wadsworth Lab, DEC, Ag. & Markets, as well providers serving the entire spectrum of health settings); energy (e.g., NYERSDA, Independent System Operator, Public Service Commission); governmental services (e.g., OTDA, OGS,); security (e.g. NYS Police, Forensic Laboratory, Dept. of Homeland Security, National Guard), and other state agencies. Smart cities require highly integrated technology solutions that often utilize advanced analytics capable of correlating historic, system-wide, or benchmark information with location-specific data generated by “smart” devices capable of sensing, locating, analyzing, and storing information for real time response and management.

Strategies to meet Goal 6:

- a. Align industry, government, academic, and not-for-profit entities located within the City of Albany to collaborate on technology, outreach, and business development projects by using the City of Albany as a living laboratory for Smart City Technologies demonstration projects with the SUNY College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering’s Smart City Technologies Innovation (SCiTI) Center as the focal point.
- b. Leverage the Capital Region’s international reputation as a unique public-private model and its critical mass of strategic technology innovation resources, industry and business development relationships, economic outreach capabilities, and education delivery services to provide highly tailored opportunities for investment in high tech growth, education, and economic development within the City of Albany.
- c. Nurture entrepreneurship by networking with other organizations concerned with economic development, and technical and financial assistance to eliminate barriers to the creation and retention of micro-businesses that are consistent with a neighborhood’s character. Establish a central portal for all business formation support services, financing, etc. and link recently awarded “Technology Hotspots” and “Start-up New York” projects with the region’s existing incubators (e.g. iCLEAN).

Intergovernmental Cooperation

Co-chairs

Hon. Daniel McCoy

Hon. John T. McDonald III

Hon. Darius Shahinfar

Dr. Marguerite Vanden Wyngaard

Transition Team Members

Hon. Michael Breslin

Hon. Dominick Calsolaro

Hon. John Clarkson

Hon. William Clay

Hon. Frank Commisso Sr.

Hon. Patricia Fahy

Hon. James Gaughan

Hon. Chris Higgins

Hon. Paula Mahan

Hon. Ellen McNulty-Ryan

Hon. Phillip Steck

Hon. Alexandra Streznewski

Hon. Paul Tonko

Introduction: Challenges and Assets

Albany is the core of the Capital Region and must be healthy for the Region to succeed. The City faces a declining tax base and the largest percentage of tax exempt property in the state, as well as a structural budget deficit of approximately 10%. In order for the City to be healthy and to meet the challenges and fiscal realities of the 21st Century, it must work with its sister municipalities to equitably and efficiently share resources and services to meet its budget and deliver services for the benefit of taxpayers in Albany and region-wide.

Albany is uniquely situated as the Capital City of a culturally and economically diverse state, with a rich history, vibrant neighborhoods, a committed citizenry and a new generation of political leadership that stands ready willing and able to meet our challenges and change the paradigm of conventional thinking. Like other Upstate cities, it is also under pressure from its taxpayers to reduce taxes and from the Governor to work with other localities to share services and cooperate. Albany also has the benefit of previous regional efforts at inter-municipal cooperation since the 1960's. These efforts show that cooperation only succeeds with a win-win approach and that municipalities must pursue long-term savings and improvements and avoid stopgap fixes and inter-municipal revenue redistribution without savings to the taxpayer, which can be divisive.

The common goal of the subcommittee is to find regional and/or inter-governmental solutions to provide services for our taxpayers more efficiently at a lower cost for the City, for our schools and for our sister municipalities. The most important step to take to identify such solutions is regular and consistent contact among the municipalities. Efforts at inter-governmental cooperation are invariably challenged by politics, bureaucratic turf battles and a mindset that is resistant to change. However,

given the fiscal realities that local and state governments face, we must work diligently to try anew, and to move beyond these challenges and to seek those areas where savings and efficiencies can be achieved.

Overview of Goals and Recommendations

Goal 1: Create a responsive City government that provides superior services for the citizens of Albany.

Goal 2: Create a sustaining Albany County Council of Local Governments to foster a partnership between and among municipalities and the Albany School District to ensure effective and efficient use of limited resources.

Goal 3: Create and support partnerships between and among non-profits to create a support a more cohesive non-profit support system for families and citizens of Albany.

Goal 4: Effectively address the problem of vacant, abandoned, and blighted buildings and land.

Goals and Strategies

Goal 1: Create a responsive City government that provides superior services for the citizens of Albany

Strategies to meet Goal 1:

- a. In order to effectively cooperate with other municipalities and the Albany City School District, Albany must undertake a top-to-bottom review of internal departmental operations by department heads to inventory assets, liabilities, and opportunities.
- b. Establish a work team to determine necessary changes, internal cost savings, and opportunities to share services with other governments.
- c. Develop a sustaining plan to implement recommended internal changes and share reviews with other governments and the Albany City School District where appropriate.

Goal 2: Create a sustaining Albany County Council of Local Governments to foster a partnership between and among municipalities to ensure effective and efficient use of limited resources

Strategies to meet Goal 2:

- a. **Schedule regular meetings among Executive-level officials (County Executive, Mayors, Supervisors) from each county municipality to identify opportunities for sharing and/or consolidation of services and to sustain such efforts.** Once developed, the school districts and authorities should be included, as should municipalities in neighboring counties where appropriate (i.e., riverfront development, land bank, sewage).
- b. **Empower individual department heads (i.e., purchasing, DGS, APD, AFD) to take ongoing responsibility for searching and taking advantage of opportunities through similar, regular meetings.**
- c. **Search for savings opportunities among “low hanging fruit.”** While significant cost savings cannot be achieved without review of high-budget departments, such as public safety, attention

should be paid to areas in purchasing, IT, civil service, payroll, snow plowing, water, police and fire dispatch, and parks.

- d. **Use the ongoing County Highway Study to identify where savings and efficiencies can be realized.**
- e. **Use the Council of Local Governments to create clear communication paths among and between local, state, and federal representatives** to ensure efficient access to and use of resources; to effectively communicate city and regional interests; and to develop a regional approach to economic development.

Goal 3: Create and support partnerships between and among non-profits to create and support a more cohesive support system for families and citizens of Albany that is effective and efficient in delivering services in a timely manner, and is coordinated with government services.

Strategy to meet Goal 3:

- a. Support and most importantly, participate in, the nascent County/Regional Council of Non-Profits taking place through the Rockefeller College.

Goal 4: Effectively address the problem of vacant, abandoned, and blighted buildings and land

Strategies to meet Goal 4:

- a. **Create a land bank by working with county officials to quickly choose what form to create.** Despite uneven performance of land banks, the recent availability of monies from the Attorney General's office specifically earmarked for land banks necessitates the creation of one for the City/County.
- b. **Work with the state to identify statutory changes needed to streamline the foreclosure process for vacant and blighted buildings** as a means to revitalize neighborhoods and reinvigorate the tax base.
- c. **Explore innovative options, programs, and solutions adopted by other cities with similar problems**, such as partnering with co-operative education programs, universities, community colleges, and arts communities that turn abandoned buildings and properties into living laboratories in which locals can learn valuable job skills while helping to invigorate distressed buildings and communities.